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ABSTRACT

Generic guidelines, based upon principles of effective training and institutional change reflected in current educational research were developed in Mississippi for the planning and implementing of staff development programs in local school districts, and these guidelines were followed when a new statewide early childhood education program was implemented. The early childhood education program contained two separate, yet complementary programs, a kindergarten program and a reading improvement, or Assistant Teacher, program, each of which had a staff development component utilizing the same basic design but modified to meet different objectives. Administrator and teacher training, curriculum design, and teacher needs as the program was being implemented were addressed in each staff development component. Activities included creation of manuals and books for staff, dissemination of materials, and evaluation of staff needs through questionnaires. Evaluation of the first year of the staff development program showed several benefits, with two-thirds of the districts indicating that technical assistance given by the program was excellent. Staff development through the Mississippi school systems has so far resulted in clarifying program goals, improving school staff communication regarding program content, improving instruction of students, and uniting early childhood educators to work for improved programs. (CB)

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The Mississippi Model-Designing and Implementing
Staff Development for Statewide Implementation
of Early Childhood Programs in Public Schools

A paper presented at the National Council of States
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The late 1970s and early 1980s were a time of regeneration for American public education. Two factors appear to have contributed to a move away from the shoulder-shrugging lack of concern for the quality of schools that had been generated in the 1960s by desegregation and by research reports that schools exerted little influence over the amount that students learned. First in influence was a body of educational research known today as effective schools research. These studies identified and described schools that were unusually effective in raising achievement levels of students from lower socio-economic levels. Their findings disputed those of the earlier reports that had concluded that socio-economic status was the strongest predictor of achievement levels. As word of the findings spread, public educators experienced a renewed sense of efficacy, and schools became interested in serving student populations that previously had been written off. A second factor contributing to the turn-around of American public education was a series of commissioned studies and reports that chronicled the country's educational ills and recommended a variety of steps toward improvement. These reports reached the ears of public officials, who used them to interest state legislatures in changing state educational systems.

The ensuing abundance of educational legislation led to the characterization of the 1980s as an era of educational reform. In 1982, the State of Mississippi became one of the first to enact a comprehensive educational reform package. Mississippi's Educational Reform Act mandated changes in virtually every aspect

of the State's educational system, from the structure of the State Department of Education to the certification of teachers and administrators to the system for accrediting public schools. The act established an official commitment to achieving literacy for all of the state's citizens and drew many of its requirements directly from the findings of effective schools research.

One of the most prominent and publicly popular features of Mississippi's Education Reform Act was an early childhood education program. The legislation mandated that all school systems provide public kindergarten for the first time in the state and also provided assistant reading instructors in grades one, two, and three through a program entitled the Mississippi Reading Improvement Program (Mississippi Code 37-21-7, 1983).

Addition of an entirely new program to the state's educational system necessitated a carefully planned and comprehensive program of staff development in order to be successful. Staff development, as a separate program and as a component of other programs, was a major concept in Mississippi's Education Reform Act. Programs containing mandates for staff development include teacher administrator certification and recertification, school accreditation, and the early childhood education program. The numerous changes generated by the Act needed a vehicle through which they could be introduced and institutionalized into the public schools, and staff development was intended to be that vehicle for change.

Because requirements for staff development appeared in several programs, coordinating all under an umbrella staff

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development program simplified program administration and avoided confusion among school district personnel regarding specific requirements. One set of guidelines for staff development programs to be operated by local school districts was constructed; the various programs offering staff development provided content and specific applications of the guidelines.

Since Mississippi's Education Reform Act was intended as a comprehensive revamping of the state's educational system and since staff development was identified as the mechanism for enacting the mandated changes, it was necessary to insure that the staff development program guidelines adopted by the state facilitate changes in individual performance leading to improvements in institutional performance. Thus, the state designed generic guidelines that were based upon principles of effective training and institutional change that were reflected in the current literature in educational research.

One of the most influential studies of change within educational organizations was the Rand Corporation's evaluation of federally funded programs designed to introduce and spread innovative practices in public schools. This study found that programs that were successful in making changes in schools relied heavily on staff development programs (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). Successful programs demonstrated four broad characteristics (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978): 1) The commitment of all personnel, particularly teachers, to the planned change. This was generally fostered by administrators who planned collaboratively with teachers and enhanced by a more comprehensive change effort. The

Rand Study found that teachers' commitment could not be bought with external rewards such as money; rather, intrinsic rewards that emphasized teachers' professionalism were successful in motivating teachers to participate wholeheartedly in a planned change effort. 2) The methods used to put the project into practice. Successful change efforts used two complementary types of activities: staff training, which helped teachers assimilate the information provided in training into their daily routines. Activities had to be perceived by teachers as worthwhile in order for them to be effective. 3) The effectiveness, support and interest of central office staff in the project. The quality of the leadership available to project staff and the climate of the schools in which teachers worked interacted to enhance the success of planned change efforts. 4) The characteristics of the teachers involved in the change effort. The single most important attribute of teachers involved in successful change was a sense of efficacy - the teacher's belief that he or she was capable of affecting student performance.

These findings led the study's authors to summarize characteristics of effective staff development programs as follows:

- 1) Successful programs involve classroom teachers in planning, identifying problems and solutions.
- 2) Successful programs rely more heavily on the involvement of local staff than on outside consultants.
- 3) Successful programs allowed sufficient time for changes to take place, sometimes several years.

- 4) Successful programs were part of an overall process of improvement within schools.
- 5) Successful programs take into account organizational factors within the school and school district.

In a similar study, Little (1981) examined staff development programs improving performance in urban desegregated schools and found that they tended to be characterized by collaboration between program planners and participants; collective (group) participation in staff development activities; focus on specific goals; and provisions for frequent practice and interaction. She concluded that successful staff development was "less a question of development of individual teachers and more a question of organizational changes." (p. 36)

Additional research corroborates the findings of these two studies (Griffin, 1983; Gusky, 1986; Hutson, 1981). In a summary of research findings related to effective staff development programs, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory identified the following components of successful programs:

1. Staff development should prepare educators to implement research findings and best practices related to carrying out their job responsibilities.
2. Staff development should be based upon clear, well-understood, specific goals and objectives that are congruent with institutional and personal goals.
3. Staff development should focus on actual school goals, problems, needs, and plans; should be conducted, whenever feasible, in the school setting.

4. Staff development should be conducted in a supportive climate of trust, peer support, open communication, and staff commitment to clearly understood institutional goals.
5. Staff development should address participant attitudes, skills, and knowledge.
6. Staff development programs should be cooperatively developed by those involved and affected by the program.
7. Staff development should emphasize use of rewards which have been shown to promote high commitment and performance.
8. Staff development should be based upon assessed needs of participants.
9. Staff development should be supported by leaders at the district level and building level through their participation in staff development activities with their peers and subordinates.
10. Staff development programs should provide for follow up and assistance to educators as they use their new skills and understandings in the work setting after they have been trained (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1984).

All of the above features were incorporated into a set of guidelines that structured the process of planning and implementing staff development programs in local districts. The guidelines were sufficiently general to allow them to be adapted to the specific requirements of any individual program. The ensuing description of the implementation of the early childhood education program will demonstrate the efficiency and versatility

of Mississippi's staff development model.

The early childhood education program in Mississippi contains two separate, yet complementary programs. Developing a statewide staff development program for each required utilization of the same basic design, but with modification as a result of different program goals and objectives. The common problems regarding development of the staff development component of both programs revolved around lack of staff at the state level and lack of funds for the development and dissemination of program materials utilized in staff development training.

The development of training and resource materials for school district staff that addressed a program not yet implemented, as was the situation with the kindergarten program, was a unique problem. One hundred fifty-four school districts were randomly surveyed with a questionnaire to ascertain what they perceived to be the areas of program implementation requiring the most immediate attention. The results indicated that school districts had major concerns regarding virtually every aspect of the program. It was determined at this point that a massive plan of action must be formulated and implemented within a two year period in order for school districts to be adequately prepared to receive tens, hundreds, or thousands of children into a viable educational setting. After establishing overall program goals and reviewing resources it was decided that the staff development program would be developed and implemented in phases. Phase I dealt with program application development and dissemination of the application information. In conjunction

with this, an administrator's handbook for implementation of kindergarten was developed and disseminated to assist school staff members in making the program application. Phase II addressed teacher training and curriculum design for the pilot program year and Phase III was developed to meet the needs of teachers as they implemented the program statewide.

The early childhood advisory committee which was established to set program policy and guidelines was utilized in the organizational plan for staff development material development and delivery. The committee consisted of early childhood educators and advocates from all concerned factions in the state. As a result of an existing kindergarten advocacy statewide network of educators, a cadre of experts was easily identified. Organization of these individuals was done through the State Department of Education Early Childhood Coordinator. Even though there were no funds allocated for program consultants, every educator contacted agreed to complete the task assigned. The time line imposed on the development of materials resulted in simultaneous projects being undertaken by committees working in related program areas. The development of the administrator's handbook was completed by committees established throughout the state. The Early Childhood Coordinator developed an outline for the content of the handbook and additional outlines were developed for each chapter of the book. Committee chairpeople and members were appointed by the Early Childhood Coordinator for each chapter. The content of this book addresses program areas such as philosophy, goals, qualifications of personnel,

information regarding the characteristics of kindergarten children, the classroom environment, program curriculum, program equipment and materials, program assessment and the role of parents. Over fifty educators from college and university settings, public and private preschool programs and Head Start contributed their time and talent to complete this portion of Phase I. Meeting through a committee structure with the Early Childhood Coordinator in central locations across the state, assignments were made to individual members with due dates that required immediate attention. Each committee chairperson collected assignments, made additions, deleted duplicate information, and mailed the draft copy to the Early Childhood Coordinator for final editing and printing. The collaboration between agencies promoted ownership of the program and the network established as a result of this experience proved successful in lobbying legislators for allocation of funds to actually implement the program in the schools.

While the development of the administrator's handbook was taking place another group of educators was working to develop a teacher's resource handbook to assist in program implementation. The same committee approach was taken with appointed chairpersons and members. Educators selected for work in compiling this book were chosen based on their expertise with regard to specific curriculum areas. Prior to the development of this book numerous curriculum guides from other states were reviewed to determine the most appropriate format and content. After examining the guides it was determined that the teacher's resource book would

need to be a combination of theoretical information and practical application in order to most adequately convey program philosophy, goals, curriculum design, daily application of the curriculum through student activities and program evaluation to teachers of various educational levels and years of teaching experience.

The committee effort resulted in the development of a very complete document which addresses all curriculum areas common to a kindergarten program. Specific activities for each curriculum area are written in a consistent format which includes a behavioral objective, procedure, list of materials and method of evaluation. Over six hundred activities are listed with numerous patterns and illustrations. Information relating to learning theory, program philosophy and goals developed for the administrator's handbook was combined with curriculum information resulting in a very thorough resource which is currently utilized by over one thousand teachers as well as being considered as a university text for undergraduate early childhood students. Over sixty educators participated in this task and, as a result of their involvement, developed a sense of program ownership as did those involved in the development of the administrator's handbook.

To further promote program ownership and to validate the staff development material developed, the teacher's resource book was field tested by several private and Chapter I funded public kindergarten classes. Head Start agencies also participated in the field testing. Revisions were made in the book following the

recommendations made by teachers as a result of the field testing. To assist in the dissemination of the book for field testing, various work committee members delivered copies to participating schools and centers in their locales.

The more than one hundred educators who participated in these two phases served not only as program experts, but became staff development catalysts within the agencies they represented. Upon completion of their work they returned to their respective agencies and began paving the way for the dissemination of the materials through informal meetings and discussions with colleagues.

Dissemination of the materials proved to be a greater challenge than developing them. A very limited budget for printing and postage and the inadequate number of State Department of Education staff members assigned to the task resulted in a regional dissemination plan. The state was divided into five regions. These regions corresponded to the regional designations of kindergarten program funds which were determined by the program funding formula. Staff development for accredited private and public schools originated by the State Department of Education relating to the kindergarten program followed this regional delivery format through Phases I and II. Phase III of the program related to the training of over one thousand kindergarten teachers and administrators. In reviewing the objectives of that phase of the staff development program, it became evident that two-day training sessions would be warranted as opposed to the one-day sessions conducted during Phases I and

II. Seven training sessions were conducted across the state to accommodate participants with regard to the distance from home. In all phases of delivery of information to school staff members each school district was responsible for the expenses incurred by those representing the district.

The training and dissemination of information to school staff in Phases I and II was done by the Early Childhood Coordinator. Individuals from the Mississippi Association On Children Under Six, a statewide child advocacy group, and members of the committees which originated the training materials assisted the Early Childhood Coordinator in registering participants and disseminating materials. Training sessions were held in public school or college/university settings central to each region. Phase III of the statewide plan involved a two pronged approach to meet the needs of the teachers implementing a statewide kindergarten program. One training session was conducted by the Early Childhood Coordinator who provided participants with information regarding state program philosophy and goals, learning theory, curriculum, and instructional techniques that were to be employed in the daily instruction of students. The other session was conducted by a master kindergarten teacher who had worked in a public school tuition program for six years and served as a pilot year kindergarten teacher the previous school year. The sessions conducted by this teacher focused on the pragmatic implementation of the more theoretical information presented by the Early Childhood Coordinator. In structuring this presentation around safety with

an emphasis on teaching children about car restraints as the curriculum unit example, the Governor's Highway Safety Commission funded a grant that provided additional materials for the training sessions and funds to pay the consultative fees requested by the teacher. Utilization of funding sources outside the State Department of Education and the network of early childhood advocates/educators allowed a limited state staff with a small staff development budget to significantly impact public schools in the state with regard to early childhood education.

In the presentation of information to the district program coordinator and/or targeted teachers in all these phases of the staff development model, material was structured to encourage replication at the school building level by those in attendance. The "trainer of trainer" concept was promoted by the format used in the presentation of materials, easily accessible state produced video tapes which could be purchased at cost or secured through loan from the State Department of Education and a requirement that all kindergarten teachers have a copy of the teacher's resource book. The staff development sessions conducted at the regional and local level were encouraged to be included in the newly developed statewide staff development system formulated in conjunction with the soon-to-be implemented performance-based school accreditation plan. This system mandates that all teachers successfully earn twenty-six staff development credits per contractual period in order to retain state certified status in their area of endorsement.

In conducting a program evaluation of the pilot program year

in which two hundred fifty kindergarten classes were funded in one hundred eight school districts, early childhood coordinators were surveyed on a variety of program related topics. The responses regarding staff development prior to program implementation and through the pilot program year (Phases I and II) revealed that 68% of those districts responding indicated technical assistance in the form of the model described was excellent and 32% of those responding indicated it was adequate (Correro, Shaklee, & Grace, 1986). An examination of the t ratios of kindergarten student's scores when a t test was computed to determine whether significant gain occurred with regard to readiness as measured by a standardized test, revealed that significant gain at the .001 level was realized in all subtest areas: Sounds and Letters, Word Reading, Listening, Mathematics, Environment and Total Reading (Correro, Shaklee, & Grace, 1986). While the gains recorded in student achievement are the result of a number of variables, one large contributing factor that must be credited is the effectiveness of the staff development model described.

The Mississippi Reading Improvement (Assistant Teacher) Program which originally provided for assistant reading instructors in grades one, two and three in all public schools was mandated by law to be implemented prior to the kindergarten program. Many school districts in the state employed classroom aides through funds available as a result of federal programs housed in the school district. These classroom aides were not required to possess any minimum educational standards nor did

they operate under standard job descriptions. The Assistant Teacher Program established not only reading instructors in primary grades, but also required candidates to undergo proficiency testing prior to employment, standardization of job responsibilities, and a staff development program designed to promote a teacher/assistant teacher team approach to instruction.

Funds were appropriated to implement the program in September, 1983, during the 1983 state legislative session. This resulted in a time frame of less than six months to formulate and disseminate program information and staff development material to school districts. The phase-in program involved the placement of assistant teachers on a grade by grade basis. The first program year assistants would be placed in first grade, the second year assistants would be placed in first and second grades, and the third year would find assistant teachers in grades one, two, and three.

The development and implementation of the staff development component of the program was very similar to the plan formulated to address staff development concerns in the kindergarten program. The assistant teacher advisory committee consisting of public school and university educators, served as resource people in making decisions regarding immediate teacher/assistant teacher needs that should be addressed through written material and video tapes.

Lack of money and adequate staff at the State Department of Education for use in developing and disseminating staff development materials proved to be the largest obstacles to

overcome in meeting the implementation deadlines. Realizing the immediate need for development of program guidelines and staff development materials, the State Department of Education began a search to employ an Early Childhood Coordinator whose responsibilities would include all program aspects of the yet-to-be funded kindergarten program and the Mississippi Reading Improvement Program. Low salaries of state employees and extensive travel were the primary deterrents in securing a qualified professional for the position. While the job search continued a non-profit foundation, CREATE, approved a request for funds which permitted the State Department of Education to employ a consultant to develop the basic information needed for school districts to implement the program. By August, 1983, an Early Childhood Coordinator was employed and the program implementation underway.

As the program moved into the first operational year a random needs assessment was conducted among the one hundred fifty four public school districts in the state. The results of the assessment were used in planning the format and topics of discussion in the staff development material for the ensuing years.

The budget allocations for the Assistant Teacher Program address funding of staff development primarily through a set amount of grant-in-aid dollars disbursed directly to the school districts. This funding is computed on the basis of the number of assistant teachers designated to school districts. The number of assistant teachers per school district is determined by the

calculation of a teacher-student enrollment (average daily attendance computation) ratio. Staff development funds may be spent by school districts only on State Department of Education approved staff development activities. Since these funds are paid to school districts in addition to those monies allocated to districts through general staff development, primary grade teachers and assistants are given an opportunity to participate in a more varied staff development menu.

The dissemination of staff development materials during the first year of the program was very similar to the regional approach utilized in the kindergarten program. In the years following, greater expectations were placed on school district personnel to utilize the additional funds allocated for the purpose of staff development. During the last three years the State Department of Education coordinated the development and dissemination of three publications per year for school district program coordinators to utilize in staff development sessions with program participants. The general format of the training manuals consists of "leader" material which contains background information on the topic to be covered, a script to assist in directing the group, and copies of the participants' materials. The participant material is clearly identified in each publication and whenever appropriate patterns and audiovisual masters accompany the publication.

The Assistant Teacher Program evaluation conducted at the completion of the first three year cycle randomly surveyed sixteen hundred assistant teachers, three hundred supervisors,

and eighteen hundred teachers throughout the state who had participated in the program. Nearly 86% of the assistant teachers, as noted on Table 1 (See following page), felt that staff development activities had developed in them an awareness of program goals (Handley & Grace, 1986). A larger number (89.2%) felt that staff development increased their awareness of the assistant teacher's role, 83.7% reported a better understanding of the principal's role, and 90.7% of the assistant teachers perceived that their understanding of the teacher's role had also been enhanced (Handley & Grace, 1986).

Reviewing teacher responses to staff development related items in the program evaluation questionnaire, Handley and Grace (1986) reported that 73.9% of the teachers felt that staff development programs had assisted them in helping to utilize assistant teachers more effectively. Also, 70.4% of the responding teachers felt that staff development programs provide assistant teachers with resources and instruction needed for improving the instructional skills of paraprofessionals (Handley & Grace, 1986).

Analysis of the responses made by administration to evaluative questions relating to staff development substantiate the effectiveness of the program. Of the responding administrators, 91.3% felt that inservice materials provided assisted them in understanding the Assistant Teacher Program and their administrative role in that program (Handley & Grace, 1986). Staff development programs were judged to be improved over the previous year by 83.3% of the administrators responding

Table 1
Effectiveness of Staff Development Program
as Viewed by Assistant Teachers

Criteria	Overall %	First Grade %	Second Grade %	Third Grade %
Staff development helped develop awareness of program goals.	85.8	84.7	87.2	85.7
Staff development helped develop awareness of assistant teacher's role.	89.2	87.1	91.1	89.6
Staff development enhanced awareness of teacher's role.	90.7	89.2	90.1	92.1
Staff development enhanced awareness of principal's role.	83.7	82.8	83.4	84.9
Program provided information needed for instruction.	88.6	87.3	87.8	90.9
Program provided information needed to work as instructional partner.	88.4	86.2	88.1	90.9

(Handley & Grace, 1986). Administrators were questioned to determine the direct impact State Department of Education staff development materials had on the staff development programs conducted in school districts. Of the administrators responding, 59.4% indicated the majority of staff development programs conducted were taken from materials developed by the State Department of Education (Handley & Grace, 1986).

The responses from all three staff development populations indicated the staff development component of the Assistant Teacher Program did successfully meet the needs of those involved. In reviewing student achievement patterns over the previous three years, Handley (1986) observed that achievement of third grade children over the first primary grades taught by teacher-assistant teams did significantly better in the areas of total reading and total mathematics at the end of the three grade levels than those in previous years without benefit of the program. While other variables must be considered, the success of this program is directly related to its staff development component as evidenced by the responses recorded by participants.

During the 1986-87 school year, over seventy million dollars will be allocated to local school districts throughout the state to implement kindergarten and maintain the assistant teacher program. Legislation passed in 1986 allows school superintendents flexibility in the placement of assistant teachers in kindergarten through grade three. This was done to accommodate the need for a lower teacher-pupil ratio in kindergarten.

Through necessity, staff development originated and has served to clarify program goals, improve school staff communication regarding program content, improve instruction of students, and unite early childhood educators to work for improved programs. Staff development in Mississippi is a success!

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